Waking up to the sad news that groundbreaking British bad boy filmmaker Ken Russell passed away last night was bittersweet. Russell left us at the age of 84 after a series of strokes and other health issues that had been deviling him for a spell and, if published accounts are to be believed (and I choose to believe them) he died in his bed, a smile upon his face…

I can see the smile on that big, blanched, cheeky and deceivingly grandfatherly face. I was lucky enough to see it in the flesh in July 2010 at the Fantasia Film Festival where I had an encounter with Russell that I will never, ever forget (head here to read about that adventure, written when it was still buzzing with the enthusiasm of the moment).

In the annals of eccentric, pure cinema, Russell was one of the brightest lights. His was a special talent; a rowdy, passionate, unconventional way of telling tales that was filled with beauty, love of craft, darkness, dirt, glory, gore and fluids of all sorts. His work *was* life, captured on celluloid, within the parameters of a conventional running time and hidden behind the guise of commercial filmmaking.

His most notorious film, 1971's THE DEVILS is still thought of as a dangerous work, hidden from sight for reasons only known to Warner Bros. higher ups (though the cynic in me anticipates a swift release to cash in on its maker's death) and on its surface, with its warped history, masturbating, spastic nuns, horny priests, orgies, blasphemy, burning bodies and general oversexed operatic mayhem, THE DEVILS is certainly a work of shock. But the beauty of the film – and the reason I love it and hold it up as one of my favorite if not *top* favorite film of all time – is the beauty of Russell's work full stop. Peel back the impish energy, look deeper and you'll see a fragile heart, a work of truth, hope and goodness. Only the bravest souls would look past the grimy surface but those that do and did are the ones who have jettisoned this masterwork to the monolith cult film it is today.

But THE DEVILS is only one of a tapestry of remarkable films: THE MUSIC LOVERS, WOMEN IN LOVE, THE RAINBOW, TOMMY, LISZTOMANIA, WHORE, CRIMES OF PASSION, GOTHIC, LAIR OF THE WHITE WORM, SALOME'S LAST DANCE…the list is long,

lurid, frenzied and fantastic.

And the legacy is secured.

FANGORIA sends its deepest love and respect to Russell’s beloved wife, Lisi, and his entire immediate and extended family.

Farewell Uncle Ken! Shake things up in that no doubt duller than day old dishwater afterlife, and I hope there's a great selection of sugary breakfast cereal.